DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 467 695

CS 014 608

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TITLE	Teaching Reading and the At Risk Pupil.
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	9p.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Classroom Techniques; Dropout Prevention; Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; *High Risk Students; Problem Solving; *Reading Instruction; Reading Material Selection; Reading Materials; Reading Programs; *Reading Skills; Student Needs; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS	Reading Uses

ABSTRACT

At risk students need to experience a reading curriculum which offers success in learning to read; appropriate sequence of reading activities; feedback regarding what has been accomplished in reading; rewards for doing well when comparing past with present achievement records; intrinsic motivation in wanting to read; help and guidance to achieve and develop in the curriculum; opportunities to interact socially with others within satisfying committee endeavors; skills to achieve across the curriculum; and assistance in self-appraisal. Just as the at-risk student needs guidance to be a successful reader, he/she needs encouragement to stay in school. The future is bleak for those without a high school diploma as a minimum. Today's generation requires more formal and informal education. There is a continuing trend of people moving from farms and small towns to urban areas, while in urban areas, factories go bankrupt or move to different locations. Accepting change and complexity, as well as being a good reader with problem-solving skills are musts in today's educational system. For the at-risk student, finding the "instructional," not the frustrational, level for reading is a must. The following types of books may be read by the at-risk student with teacher guidance: basal readers on the student's present reading level; self-selected library books for an individualized reading program; recreational reading books from the library; trade books chosen for sustained silent reading; and other types of reading materials dealing with vocational interests. Practical everyday reading experiences, such as reading shopping lists, installation directions, recipes, etc., also should be emphasized. (NKA)

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Teaching Reading and the At Risk Pupil.

by Marlow Ediger

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TEACHING READING AND THE AT RISK PUPIL

The at risk pupil is one who is doing failing school work and is experiencing much difficulty in achieving and learning. He/she faces situations of failure and may wish to drop out of school as soon as possible. Objectives of instruction are not perceived as being worthwhile to attain. At risk pupils need assistance to achieve as much as possible in reading. They need to experience a reading curriculum which offers

1. success in learning to read.
2. appropriate sequence or order of reading activities.
3. feedback in terms of what has been accomplished in reading.
4. rewards for doing well when comparing past with present achievement records in learning to read.
5. intrinsic motivation in wanting to read.
6. meaning and understanding of content read.
7. help and guidance to achieve, develop, and grow in the curriculum.
8. opportunities to interact socially with others within satisfying committee endeavors.
9. skills to achieve across the curriculum.
10. assistance in self appraisal (See Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Eleven).

The at risk pupil needs guidance to be a successful reader and be encouraged continually to stay in school. Dropping out of school provides for a dismal future.

Why Stay in School?

The future is bleak indeed for those without a high school diploma, as a minimum. Each generation of living requires more formal and informal education. My father (1890- 1966) while being engaged in farming had an eighth grade education. Farming as an occupation, then and now, is learned by growing up on and working on a farm. A hands on approach and learning by doing is stressed. Farm land is very expensive indeed and in its purchasing, there is much competition with speculators, developers, and home owners who wish to live in the country. My late brother (1922- 1999) made all of his livelihood from farming. But he had assistance in being able to farm from inheritance and being successful in renting farm land. My brother had a high school education only. At that time in 1940, about 50% of pupils graduated from high school. In his day and even many fewer

today earn a living by farming, in fact less than 2% do so. Some of the these have an additional job and that is to work in town. Some work in town to earn a living as well as support the upkeep of the farm to keep it in the family. Farm prices are very low, approximately 50% of what they were twenty years ago. This has meant a continuing trend of people moving away from the farm to urban areas to seek employment.

From urban areas, there is a continual trend of mobility. Factories go bankrupt or move to a different location. Businesses come and go. Large businesses, such as Wal Mart, crowd out the smaller ones. Even the seventh largest corporation (Enron) went bankrupt, forcing workers to go elsewhere for employment. Layoffs are common and employees then need to look for jobs elsewhere. From this brief description of trends in the economic world, the following conclusions can be readily made:

1. the kinds of work performed changes rather quickly in society. Employees need to be flexible in finding and doing new kinds of work.
2. job training for the new work place is imperative.
3. increased number of changes are occurring in society in a more complex world.
4. higher levels of education are required to meet challenges in the societal arena be it as skilled or semi-skilled common workers, as well as for those in the professions.
5. reading proficiently, problem solving skills, together with creative and critical thinking, are salient in today's world (See Bracey, 2002).

Thus, accepting change and complexity, as well as being a good reader with problem solving skills are musts in today's system of education. The at risk pupil, as well as all pupils, have a plethora of important objectives to achieve which cut across all curriculum areas. This means that leading objectives of instruction need to focus upon what is emphasized in society and its many impacts and influences upon pupils in the school setting. Most schools today (Vander Ark, 2002) serve students who are more diverse, come from more varied life circumstances, and are less motivated by traditional means.

Meeting Needs of the At Risk

There are a plethora of needs which the at risk have. It may begin with necessities in life such as food, clothing, and shelter. Should the school become involved in these areas? The answer

is "yes" if pupils at risk are to learn to read. No one can learn if he/she is hungry. The school generally does provide five meals a week at noon, and then breakfast is served at most schools, for those who can/cannot pay for the meals. This is not adequate since there are weekends and dinner which still is necessary for all children. After school programs for latch key children should be extended so that at risk pupils may experience an enriched curriculum as well as an evening meal. Weekend programs providing needed food and curricular activities which encourage and motivate the at risk should also be in the offing.

At risk pupils who come from unsafe home environments where drugs, guns, and violence are in evidence cannot do well in learning to read. Community programs must be there to encourage a variety of well supervised experiences for the at risk. These need to be available evenings and weekends. A safe school environment is not adequate since there are too many additional hours remaining during the week.

Summer school for the at risk is needed to focus on essential objectives, worthwhile learning opportunities, and assessment procedures in reading. During the regular school year, at risk pupils need encouragement and backing to attend school each day as well as to be there on time. Punctuality and responsibility are important traits to develop.

Too frequently, the at risk has feelings of being an isolate. All at risk desire to become a part of a group and be accepted. The at risk teacher needs to work in the direction of helping pupils to feel welcomed within group settings. A school is a social institution and pupils must have social needs met. Worthwhile tasks and meaningful instruction go a long way in fostering pupils need for belonging when working within committees. Within a group setting, at risk pupils need to feel that their contributions are worthwhile and are considered so by others. To frequently, the at risk has experiences the "put down" as well as rude behavior. This kind of environment can be changed so that the at risk experiences gratifying behaviors (Ediger, 2001,101- 107).

Reading and the At Risk Pupil

The at risk pupil needs to experience a reading curriculum which harmonizes with his/her present achievement level. The teacher needs to determine the base line of where the pupil is achieving presently in reading. Teacher observation may be used to ascertain where the pupil is at the present time in reading achievement. Finding the instructional, not the

frustrational level, for reading then is a must. In addition to teacher observation, standardized tests may also be used to ascertain where the instructional level of reading is for the at risk. Results from an informal reading inventory may also offer indicators for the instructional level of reading. Thus, the teacher needs to begin reading instruction at the pupil's present level of attainment. The at risk must experience that which is interesting in the teaching of reading. Holism needs emphasis in that the at risk needs to read subject matter which is not segmented for instruction in phonics and other word recognition techniques while reading. However, phonics may be taught, as needed, before and after reading activities have commenced. A games procedure should be used to teach phonics such as asking pupils which words do you see on the page which start like the word "boy," as an example. Or, "Do you see a word which ends like man?" "Did you notice other letters or words you would like to discuss?" Learning by discovery can be an excellent way of noticing likenesses and differences. During reading time, an unidentified word may be pronounced within a few seconds to the reader. The interval here, of a few seconds, gives time to the at risk in attempting to identify the unknown. The following types of books may be read by the at risk with teacher guidance:

1. basal readers on the present reading level of the pupil, regardless of the grade level indicated on the reader.
2. self selected library books for an individualized reading program. This includes a conference with the teacher after completing the reading of the book.
3. at risk pupils need to be challenged to take home library books to read which are on the recreational level of reading. These are read for enjoyment and for practice. At risk need to read as much as possible to become proficient readers.
4. trade books chosen to read for sustained silent reading (SSR).
5. other types of reading materials such as those dealing with vocational or avocational interests (Ediger, 2002, 16- 19).

Studies made of adults who cannot read find life to be embarrassing as in the following cases and situations:

1. a person in a group who waits until others have ordered their food and then orders the same thing as another individual.
2. a worker in a warehouse who continually fills easy to read orders out incorrectly and finally, with embarrassment, admits to the supervisor that he cannot read well enough to fill these orders.
3. a driver goes to well known places in the neighborhood

only, due to not being able to read newly met road signs.

4. a person in church who pretends to follow the order of services in the church bulletin, but comes to a volunteer reading clinic admitting he truly wants to learn to read, but can't.

5. individuals who cannot locate items in a grocery store due to not being able to read the store menu in order to find the unknown.

Practical reading experiences then need to also be emphasized such as in the above five listings. Sometimes the reader of a manual may be able to read complex items such as an automobile mechanic. The author brought in a 1991 model care for repair work, the mechanic said he had forgotten certain things in how to do the work on an older car model. So he went to the archives section where older car manuals are stored. He read the needed selections and quickly made the repairs. The manual was certainly not easy to read for the lay person. But for an automobile mechanic, who has much background information, it appeared to be relatively easy reading. No doubt, the interests of the mechanic and the practicality of the situation made it so that comprehension of the manual was possible. It might even be that this mechanic did a considerable amount of reading, outside his work duties and responsibilities. What this does say is that a purposeful, practical activity can assist pupils to improve reading skills. The at risk teacher needs to locate reading materials that might be of vocational and avocational interests to pupils. Teachers need to continually assess the interests of pupils so that reading materials may be located to meet personal interests and purposes.

Additional practical every day reading experiences might well include the following:

1. writing and reading shopping lists of items to be purchased.

2. reading directions to install an item such as a door bell.

3. reading a recipe and following through with the making of that food item.

4. reading and writing friendly and business letters. These may be readily sequenced from those being less complex to increasing levels of complexity.

5. developing an experience chart whereby the pupil presents the ideas, based on items/objects viewed, for the teacher to records. In this way, the at risk can notice talk written down and then reading what is on the experience chart (See Emery, 1992).

The At Risk Pupil in The Classroom

Adequate assistance needs to be given to the regular classroom teacher when at risk pupils are taught with the other learners. One good source may well be the retired teacher. Retired teachers do want to use their skills after retirement, but with reduced hours involved. They might then be involved in diagnosing and remediation of pupil difficulties in reading. These problem areas may include the following:

1. omitting vital words when reading aloud. Omission of selected words could make for a lack of meaningful contextual reading. Distortion of ideas read might then be in the offing.
2. adding words not in the printed sentence(s).
3. substituting words for those in actual context.
4. reading in a halting manner. The trend of thought Is lost too frequently with the lack of sequential words identified in reading.
5. repeating words which were already pronounced correctly.
6. failure to read in thought units.
7. engagement in word calling while reading, without comprehending its contents.
8. omission of commas, periods, and other punctuation marks when reading.
9. addition of punctuation marks which causes distorted meanings.
10. incorrect reading of direct quotations (See Ediger, 1996, 145- 161).

Practice needs to be provided for at risk to overcome the above enumerated deficiencies. Volunteers and paraprofessionals may listen to the at risk read orally and pronounce words for these pupils as needed so that sequential ideas are acquired.

After school programs as well as summer school might well help at risk to improve reading skills and attitudes. These programs of reading instruction need to be carefully planned. Quality objectives stressing understandings, skills, and the affective domain need to be in the offing. The teacher needs to start reading instruction with where each pupil is presently in achievement. Good sequence needs to follow each learner in reading achievement. Learning opportunities need to be interesting, motivating, and provide for individual differences so

that optimal achievement is possible for each pupil. Assessment procedures to ascertain learner achievement in reading need to be valid, reliable, varied, and multiple. At risk pupils need adequate assistance and attention so that optimal achievement for each is in the offing!

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Publication Date: 2-21-02

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